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AUTHOR Bowers, Judy
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ABSTRACT

The Tucson Unified School District made a goal for 2000-2001 for all counselors to have their own computer at school. This article looks at how these computers are used to enhance the counselors' jobs. At the district level, the staff communicates with counselors through e-mail. Meeting reminders, general information, and upcoming events are quickly updated. Counselors are able to obtain lesson plans, books, and other resources from the Internet and from associations such as the American School Counselor Association. Counselors also directly use computers with their students. Career and college software programs are used with both middle and high school students. Corresponding with neighboring or national districts is possible via the Internet. Support for the program is provided through the district home page. This information is used to evaluate student performance and to suggest solutions for raising achievement. Future plans include updating the guidance and counseling home page to provide direct links to resources, and arranging for free instructions for counselors in computer and Internet use. (JDM)

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by

Judy Bowers

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Chapter Eleven

Using Technology to Support Comprehensive Guidance Program Operations: *A Variety of Strategies*

Judy Bowers
Tucson Unified School District, Tucson, Arizona

School counselors have discovered that the computer is as important a communication tool as the telephone. Yes, technology has become a necessity for school counselors in the 21st century. Counselors use computers in their daily work with students, in their lesson preparation to meet the competencies of their developmental guidance programs, and as a communication tool on district, state, and national levels.

Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), where I work, has approximately 180 school counselors working in 74 elementary schools, 20 middle schools, and 10 high schools. The goal for the 2000–01 school year is for all the counselors to have their own computers. I have been working with the director of our Technology Department for the past three years to make this plan a reality. Of course, everything comes down to money, and computers are an expensive item. This director has been a strong supporter of the school counselors, and she believes the computer is as important a tool as the telephone. She has been a strong advocate to secure the financial backing to obtain the computers. From our experience, important things to remember when advocating for new technology is don't get too pushy, and send polite reminders not nasty notes.

In-District Communication via Electronic Mail

At the district level, my staff communicates with the counselors via computer. All counselors have their own e-mail addresses, and the guidance administrative secretary has set up list serves for the elementary, middle, and high school counselors. She is able to send out meeting notices, reminders about special happenings, and other information very

quickly. This capacity has saved the guidance secretary many hours of mailing time. In addition, my staff corresponds with principals and district administrators via the Internet. I have found that principals like receiving e-mail notification of counselors' meetings. If they know the topic of the meeting, they are more willing to send their counselors. In addition, they appreciate notice of when the counselor will be out of the school. Keeping lines of communication open is very important to a successful counseling program, and the Internet has helped make this happen.

Obtaining Professional Resources via the Internet

Counseling lessons are available from many sources via the Internet. Through workshops, counselors have learned of a number of websites that are useful in finding lessons. The resource counselors in my office have become experts in finding Internet resources, and they answer resource requests from the counselors. The consensus among the counselors is that the Internet has saved them many hours of searching in the library for materials or waiting for books to arrive. A very important feature of Internet resources is that most are free. Because many school counselors have limited budgets for materials, they appreciate being able to obtain current information for the cost of paper.

The website of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a gold mine of information. ASCA has a modern, up-to-date site that is easy for school counselors to use. Information on joining the association, yearly conference registration forms, and ethical information are just a few of the topics available on the site. There is a "members only" section where special packets have been loaded for members to download.

Use of Computers in Direct Work with Students

Counselors work with students to access a variety of information via the computer. High school counselors have become avid users of the many resources that make it easier to access information for students. A number of commercial companies have published career and college software that enables students to take an interest inventory, review a list of job options, and look in postsecondary programs of study. In addition, with a counselor's help, students are able to locate many scholarship opportunities. My district has purchased two career and college software programs, which have been installed in the computer labs of all of the high schools.

As a component of the developmental guidance program, counselors use these programs in classrooms at each grade level. Ninth-grade students typically will take the interest inventory and begin exploring career options. Tenth-grade students will examine career options and begin looking at postsecondary options. In 11th grade, students will focus on postsecondary options and begin identifying scholarship opportunities. Then in 12th grade, students will use the software to firm up their career, postsecondary, and scholarship choices and look for job opportunities. Through the Internet, it is possible to look into each state's job database and find job openings and salary information. Another interesting Internet search for students is to take a virtual tour of various college campuses. Students today have a wealth of information available to them through the computer.

Many middle school counselors use similar software as they teach career awareness lessons. As part of a district technology program that was implemented several years ago, the director of technology purchased career software for all 20 middle schools. In retrospect, the important factor in gaining the support of district-level administrators for this purchase was to explain how the technology and software would enhance our school guidance program. Another important factor is always to show how the program enhances student achievement and serves all students.

Collaboration with Other District Administrators

Developing positive relations with district administrators is probably the most important strategy in the success of a guidance program. In addition, it is helpful if district administrators are familiar with the overall developmental guidance program and know a little about you. In looking back over the years, I feel that one of the factors contributing to my successful relationship with the technology director is that we have worked together for 20 years. During those years, we have worked together at a school site where she was a math teacher and I was a high school counselor. Later we worked together on various committees over the years, and now we both work at the district level. Our mutual respect has grown and contributes to our working together in a positive manner for all students.

As a guidance coordinator, I depend on technology as an important asset in performing my job responsibilities. An important feature is the ease of communicating with counselors and principals. Most people read their e-mail on a daily basis and respond promptly. This type of correspondence is more efficient than playing phone tag or using the mail.

Out-of-District Communication via Electronic Mail and the Internet

In addition to corresponding with district personnel, I also correspond with counselors in neighboring districts, across the state, and around the country. Frequently I will receive e-mail from a student in a counselor training program who has found our TUSD Guidance and Counseling Handbook on the Internet. Usually the student will have some questions about the program and want additional information.

My most exciting use of the Internet is in connecting with prospective employees. Several years ago, a counselor in New Hampshire found me in Tucson, we corresponded about counseling openings, and he ended up taking a counseling position with my district. All counseling positions are posted weekly on the employment section of the TUSD home page, and application forms can be downloaded as well. This wonderful use of technology allows interested counselors to check job openings on a weekly basis, fill out the appropriate forms, and fax them to the Human Relations Office. Interested counselors can also locate the guidance home page and find my phone number and e-mail address.

Professional Counselor Support via the Internet

Counselors have found many resources available on the Internet for classroom lessons, for professional information, and for parent workshops. In addition there are list serves enabling counselors to communicate with other counselors across the world. The elementary vice president of ASCA has developed a list serve for elementary counselors and sponsors frequent chat rooms to discuss issues of concern to elementary counselors. Counselors will share many lessons via the list serve, including information about websites that have outstanding materials. The American School Counselor Association provides information on the ASCA website for counselors. As a guidance coordinator, I feel it is always wise to know the leaders in the counseling field and to establish beneficial relationships. By communicating with ASCA board members, the executive director, and staff via the website, I have been able to contribute suggestions of benefit to all counselors and to share with the national leaders information that was developed by the counselors in my district.

Program Support via the District Home Page

TUSD has an intranet system that counselors can use to look at student and school achievement. Training is provided each year for the new counselors and for counselors who wish a review. Counselors and principals cooperate in using this information to evaluate students' performance and suggest solutions for raising achievement. In addition, the district has a very extensive home page with many links. The main page has links to broad areas like employment, school calendar, professional development, school board, and departments. Counselors can use the TUSD home page to access job openings, professional development listings, and information about the various departments in the district, thereby saving time making on phone calls and waiting for information to arrive in the mail. A good example is the link from the professional development page to the Arizona Department of Education, where counselors can download recertification information instantly. To identify high schools that have career centers, counselors are able to go to a district high school page and then look at the career center links. It is possible to look at career centers in Omaha, Nebraska, or Orlando, Florida, and obtain ideas from them.

Future Plans

Plans for the future include updating the guidance and counseling home page to provide direct links to resources such as parent information, career and college information, ASCA, violence prevention, counselor professional development dates, and more. In addition, counselors will receive yearly training in word processing, registration procedures, and the use of the Internet and intranet. The district Technology Department offers many levels of word processing instruction free to the counselors. For example, many counselors use PowerPoint in designing classroom presentations for the TUSD Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance Program.

The counselors in TUSD are fortunate to have available up-to-date technology to support their comprehensive guidance program. District administrators and site principals believe counselors must have access to technology every day to support their programs. All district counselors have the support of resource counselors, and they have many professional development opportunities to improve their technology skills.

References

American School Counselor Association website:
http://www.schoolcounselor.org/

About the Author

Judy Bowers has been the guidance coordinator for the K–12 Comprehensive Competency Based Guidance Program in the Tucson Unified School District, Arizona, for seven years. Previously, she has worked as a high school guidance department coordinator, counselor, and home economics teacher. Additionally she is a university instructor and consultant. She has been an active leader in the American School Counselor Association and is a recipient of ASCA's Supervisor/ Administrator Award. She can be reached at judy.bowers@tusd.k12.az.us